

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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**Testimony of
Leslie Gabel-Brett
Executive Director
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Human Services Committee
Tuesday, March 1, 2005**

In Support of:

**SB 671, AAC Concerning the Annual Report Submitted by the Commissioner of Social Services to the General Assembly
SB 801, AAC Legislative Review and Approval of Waiver Applications Prior to Submittal to the Federal Government**

Good afternoon Senator Handley, Rep. Villano and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of two bills before you today that will increase accountability and help our state formulate effective policies to increase access to health care.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women supports SB 801, AAC Legislative Review and Approval of Waiver Applications Prior to Submittal to the Federal Government. This is a good government bill that will have the greatest impact on state policies regarding public benefit programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, energy assistance, housing assistance and so on. The majority of adults who rely on safety net health care and nutrition programs are low-income single mothers and their children. In the current climate of "devolution," states are often given greater authority, through waivers, to shape or change the rules governing eligibility and benefits for these essential programs. When such significant decisions are made, the voices of those affected must be heard and must have some weight in the decision-making process.

Under current state law, the committees of cognizance in the General Assembly must review a waiver to the federal government and a public hearing must be held. However, an executive branch agency may proceed to submit such a waiver regardless of the outcome of any vote taken by the committees.

The proposed bill would require any waiver to be approved by the committees of cognizance following a public hearing and to reflect any changes required by the committees before such waiver is submitted to the federal government. This is the best way to ensure that members of the public have an opportunity to make their voices heard, both through the public hearing itself, and through their elected representatives. One responsibility of the PCSW is to ensure that the voices of women and girls are heard when state policy is formulated, and that is why we urge your support of this proposal.

We also support SB 671, AAC Concerning the Annual Report Submitted by the Commissioner of Social Services to the General Assembly that would require private employers with fifty or more employees to report to the Department of Social Services the number of their employees who are enrolled or have family members enrolled in public health care programs including HUSKY A, HUSKY B, SAGA, or other Medicaid programs. As you may know, the majority of part-time workers in our economy are women, and women are the majority of workers in retail and service sector employment where employer-sponsored health insurance is less likely to be offered or affordable to workers than it is in other occupational categories. Among those who are uninsured in our state, approximately 80% are in working families.¹

When employers do not provide affordable health care coverage to their workers, and the workers subsequently obtain coverage for themselves or their children through government sponsored programs, we are all, in effect, contributing to the profitability of the employer. In some cases, this may be a justifiable public policy – for example, to encourage the growth of new or small businesses in our state and to create a health safety net for our families. However, in order to evaluate the policy and make sound decisions about it, state government needs information. We support this proposed bill to gather the information we all need to evaluate our health care and economic development policies.

We thank you for your attention and urge your support of these proposals.

¹ Connecticut Health Policy Project, *op. cit.*

